



Sex Offender Dies in Cold After Being Denied From Shelter

Thomas Pauli Found Dead in Cold; Social Workers Say His Sex Offender Status Kept Him out of Shelters

By SCOTT MICHELS

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A homeless man found dead in the cold earlier this week in Michigan had been denied a place to stay in local homeless shelters because he was a [sex offender](#), social workers said.

The body of Thomas Pauli, 52, was found in the snow in an auto body salvage shop in Grand Rapids Monday. The results of an autopsy were not yet available.

Homeless service staffers who have worked with Pauli said he has been denied a spot at local shelters because of a state law that bars sex offenders from staying [within 1,000 feet of a school](#). It was not immediately clear whether Pauli had tried to stay in a shelter the night he died; shelter directors said they don't keep records of people who are denied beds.

"It is such a tragedy that I can hardly even speak about it, thinking of this poor man who froze to death because of a law that the missions had to enforce," said Marge Palmerlee, the director of the Degage Ministries. "As a community, we need to do something about this. Change has to take place."

About 20 states and dozens of cities have passed laws that restrict where sex offenders can live, banning them from areas near schools and parks. Those laws have, in some cases, forced sex offenders [out of their homes](#) or into so-called [cluster communities](#).

State Sen. Nancy Cassis, a supporter of Michigan's sex offender law, said the sex offender residency laws were sound but that it appeared the social safety net failed to protect Pauli.

"What other options did they give him?" she asked. "Were police contacted? How about the Salvation Army? Or soup kitchens, there's plenty of them. What about synagogue and churches? I view them all as part of the safety net."

"Children should be protected from sexual predators, but you can't just slam the door on another human being," she said, adding that she questioned whether Pauli should have been released from prison.

At least eight people have died from cold-related deaths in Michigan this month as storms swept the state, according to news reports. Earlier this month, a [93-year-old Bay City man froze to death](#) inside his house after a municipal power company restricted his power use because of unpaid bills.

Pauli, who was convicted of criminal sexual conduct in 1991, told several people he was having difficulty finding a place to stay, said Lori King, the supervisor of the Degage Ministries Life Enrichment Center, who had worked with the man.

Pauli struggled with substance abuse after his 2003 release from prison, said King.

"He was a very quiet, gentle man. He had impeccable manners," said King. "He wasn't at all what society would label him to be."

Homeless Man Turned Away from Shelter

Palmerlee said people had seen Pauli at local missions in the past few weeks. Officials at two local shelters said they could not confirm that Pauli had tried to stay with them on the night he died, but said they had been told he had tried to stay there in the past. They acknowledged that they would have turned him away because of the state's sex offender law.

"I would think the community would want to know he's in a protected environment instead of just roaming the street," said Bill Shaffer

of Guiding Light Ministries. "I think there really should be some concessions for the type of offense and the gravity of it. Until then, I don't know what we're going to be able to do for these people."

King said Pauli wanted people to realize that he wasn't "a monster."

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